

Government Information Center



Common Look and Feel Overview (Version 1.0)

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Introduction

This document was created to help web masters and agency officials understand the dynamics of the Common Look and Feel Initiative

Common Look and Feel Purpose

The purposes of Common Look and Feel are five fold:

- **Instill consumer confidence or “Branding”**
- **Provide a consistent layout**
- **Establish consistent core elements**
- **Increase page accessibility**
- **Ease agency site maintenance**

Overview

Overview

In an effort to standardize core web content, increase the level of web page accessibility, and ease citizen interaction with State agencies, the Government Information Center (GIC) has developed the following Common Look and Feel (CLF) templates. The goal of the CLF templates is to increase a visitor's ability to navigate agency web pages by incorporating the approved web presentation standards and best practices and by highlighting the specific Services and Information that each agency provides.

As seen on the sample page below, the Services and Information provided by the GIC are featured on the agency homepage. Looking at current web statistics and determining the most requested pages dictated the items to be contained in the Services and Information list. This methodology also allows an agency to promote items that may not be receiving the attention that they deserve, thus pages receiving less than desirable hits can also be added to these lists.

Sample View



Figure 1

Content Classification

Aside from the technical aspect of implementing this template, agencies will also be required to re-think their website design. The Services and Information methodology approach breaks down the barrier of departmental hierarchy and allows users to navigate

Overview

directly to the services or information they are seeking. This may place an initial burden on agency webmasters by making them rethink their current web design. This new methodology will require agencies to determine the “in-demand” content and may also require categorization of this content. For example if your agency has many licenses across divisions it may be necessary to create a “Licenses” page which lists all licenses regardless of the division or section they may fall under. This will allow the user to navigate from the Departmental homepage to the Licenses page and ultimately arrive at a specific license within three clicks. Conversely, a site designed with a *top-down* approach would require the user to know the departmental hierarchy to find the appropriate license.

It is the belief of the Government Information Center that the use of this Statewide Template will increase the citizen’s ability to take advantage of Delaware’s online services and information.

Before implementing these procedures, please read both the CLF Implementation Guide and the other supporting documents listed at the end of this document for answers to common questions.

Template Accessibility

Importance

As stated in the overview section above, one of the primary goals of implementing a statewide Common Look and Feel is to increase the level of accessibility of the agency websites. It is imperative for all websites especially public sector websites to acknowledge that many of their users are accessing their website with special user agents and technologies.

The architecture of the CLF templates was designed with this concept in mind. The majority of the elements defined under the Template Architecture sections of this document were selected to ensure compliance with the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and state accessibility standards.

As should be expected, new accessibility technologies are emerging all the time. As they become available they are being evaluated by the Government Information Center and plans are made for inclusion into future versions of the CLF templates. An example is the availability of efficient web page text conversion scripts. A script is currently being developed that will allow web pages to be converted to a text only version of the source web page. This text-only script once completed will be available to all State agencies and will be included in the header and/or footer of the next revision of the CLF templates.

Due diligence has been given to ensure that all many user agents render the CLF pages successfully.

Verification

The CLF templates achieve Level A compliance by passing all “Priority 1” checkpoints set forth under the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)’s Web Access Initiative in the Checklist for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0.

More information about the accessibility of the CLF templates and the State Portal (Delaware.gov) can be view at: <http://www.delaware.gov/agencies/egovernment/access>.

Template Architecture

The architecture of the CLF templates provided by the Government Information Center has been approved by the Department of Technology and Information. The architecture consists of:

- HTML
- Server Side Includes
- Cascading Style Sheets

HyperText Markup Language (HTML)

The CLF templates consist of valid HTML 4.0 code and utilize the standard HTML 4.0 transitional document type and definition (DTD). Transitional was selected instead of strict to allow “presentation control for user agents that don’t (adequately) support style sheets”. The final result of the coding techniques implemented produces clean compliant code that renders correctly on several commonly used browsers.

All of the CLF templates (excluding SSI components) have been validated for HTML 4.0 compliance using the online validation tool provided by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). <http://validator.w3.org/> It is the agency’s responsibility to ensure that new pages maintain this compliancy rating by using online validators and good coding practices. The “about this site” link on the footer of the CLF pages displays the image listed below to ensure the website users of the W3C compliance of the HTML code.

Indicator of W3C compliant HTML



Server Side Include Files

Server Side Include (SSI) files are used to create the pages in the template. You will notice that every template page has the .shtml extension rather than .htm or .html. This signifies to the web server that the file contains a server side directive and additional parsing must be completed on the server to create the full HTML document. SSI files allow the user to embed common routines into straight HTML code. This greatly reduces site maintenance since common code such as navigation can now be modified in one place. Each of the CLF template files contains external SSI calls. Below is a sample of what the SSI call looks like:

```
<!--#include file ="navigation/nav-home.html"-->  
<!-- HOME LINKS: To change the home links, go to the include file listed above -->
```

In the example above the template is calling the nav-home.html file to insert the Home links for the left navigation bar. The include files used in the template fall into 2 categories: agency modifiable and State maintained. Below each is defined:

CLF Template Architecture

State Maintained SSI – The State maintained SSI files are located in the root of the /Private/ folder. These files make up the header and footer of the resulting CLF web page. To preserve their integrity these files should not be modified by the agencies.

- head.html
- header.html
- headerlogo.html
- b.html
- b2.html
- b3.html
- b4.html
- f.html
- f2.html

Agency Modifiable SSI – The SSI files that need to be maintained by the agencies are located in the /Navigation/ folder. These files control the site title, the home, services, and information navigation options and the links on the footer.

- sitetitle.html – This is the “breadcrumb trail” back to the Department level. Below is an image showing the sitetitle portion of the page.
- nav-home.html – Lists items located under the Home portion of the left navigation bar.
- nav-services.html – Lists items located under the Services option of the left navigation bar. (also used in the body of the home page)
- nav-information.html - Lists items located under the Information option of the left navigation bar. . (also used in the body of the home page)
- footer.shtml – Contains links to common components required by the web presentation guidelines. This files calls two State Maintained files (f.html and f2.html) and needs to be a .shtml extension to properly include nested files.

More information about the use of external SSI’s can be found in Appendix C “To Include or Not To Include...”.

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) technologies were incorporated into the CLF templates to separate the *presentation attributes* from the *content*. This separation creates more accessible code and ensures that the pages can be displayed on a wider variety of devices. It also enables the centralization of basic styles and provides a greater level of control over the required presentation components in multiple browsers.

The CSS used by the CLF templates are external style sheets located in the /Private/Stylesheets directory. This directory contains a global style sheet file and several style sheet files that are preconfigured for various versions of browsers and platforms. The preconfigured files contain the appropriate style and layout attributes needed to ensure the pages render correctly for the specified browser and/or platform.

CLF Template Architecture

The following list provides descriptions of the default CSS files in the Private/Stylesheets folder:

- globalstyle.css – Contains basic cross browser/platform styles
- ie5pc.css – Contains additional styles unique to Microsoft Internet Explorer version 5x and lower
- nn4pc.css – Contains additional styles unique to Netscape Navigator version 4x and lower, Mozilla x.xx, and Foxifre x.x running on a IBM based computer.
- nn4mac.css – Contains additional styles unique to Netscape Navigator version 4x and lower, Mozilla x.xx, and Foxifre x.x running on a MAC based computer.
- op5pc.css - Contains additional styles unique to Opera version .5x and lower running on a IBM based computer.

Although the style sheets in the Private/Stylesheets directory cannot be modified there is a Stylesheet folder containing the file myStyles.css that can be modified by agency staff. The myStyles file is intended to be used by agencies that have a need to use custom styles to control the presentation of the text and/or images located in the page content section. As stated before, ***any file located in the Private directory should not be modified, as this is a Government Information Center maintained directory.***

All of the CSS files used in the CLF templates have been validated for CSS compliance using the online validation tool provided by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). It is the agency's responsibility to ensure that new pages maintain this compliancy rating by using online validators and good coding practices. The "about this site" link on the footer of the CLF pages displays the image listed below to ensure the website users of the W3C compliance of the CSS.

Indicator of W3C compliant CSS 

For more information on the styles used in the CLF templates please refer to Appendix C – Style Guide.

Meta Tag Usage

The architecture of the CLF templates promotes the presentation of unique page information by utilizing structural elements called "metadata". There are several sections of the header of the CLF templates that agencies will be required to insert well-crafted metadata. This metadata will provide important orientation information to users and other online tools such as indexing tools, search engines, text translation scripts, and navigation tools. The information inserted in the metadata fields is up to the agencies and should be concise, and page appropriate. Some meta elements such as keywords and description need to be unique to the web page to prevent erroneous search engine results and/or confusion in some text browsers.

Required Metadata Elements

- Language: <html lang="en-us">

CLF Template Architecture

- Character Encoding: <meta http-equiv=Content-Type content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1">
- Title: <title>Unique, Brief Description of Page Content</title>
- Keywords: <meta name="Keywords" content="keyword1, keyword2, etc ">
- Description: <meta name="Description" content="This page contains...">

Optional Metadata Elements

- Subject
- Contributor
- Type
- Source
- Relation
- Rights
- Creator
- Publisher
- Date
- Identifier
- Coverage

A more detailed description of Metadata and a complete list possible meta elements are available at the following websites:

- <http://dublincore.org/documents/dces/>
- <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10-HTML-TECHS/#document-meta>.

CLF Template Graphics

Template Graphics

In an effort to create a “lite” website and maximize accessibility the template uses very few graphics. The use of graphics has been limited to the Header portion of the site. In figure 1 you will find the Header portion of the template.

Header Graphics



Figure 1

The header file is made up of the following *.html files located in the private\header folder:

- head.html
- header.html
- headerlogo.html

Please note: Any files and folders located in the Private folder should not be edited. These files are maintained by the Government Information Center. Any files added to this folder will be lost during future updates.

The header contains of four basic graphics:

- The “It’s good being first” button – This button is actually made up of two graphics (a.k.a. a sliced image).
- The “State of Delaware” graphic including Caesar Rodney
- The Seasonal Picture in the top right – Will change every quarter.
- The “Go” button for the search

Also in the header you can see:

- Blue bar – with shortcuts to various government agencies and sites
- Grey Bar – State directory, help and search engine.
- Department title – this is also known as a “bread crumb”

All images, except for the “It’s good being first” button, remain un-sliced for easy site maintenance. This will allow the seasonal image to be changed easily. When a seasonal picture change is required the agencies will be supplied with the appropriate image.

CLF Template Graphics

Agency Logo

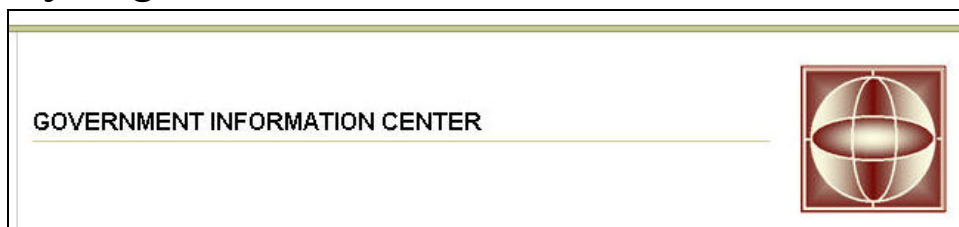


Figure 2

The only other required image usage, besides in the header, is on the home page of each department and division. Each department and division shall display their logo in the 125px by 125px space provided. In the event that a Department or Division does not have a logo the Great Seal of Delaware shall be used. (Note: The Great Seal of Delaware was update in June 2004. Please contact the Secretary of State's office of the official seal)

Other Graphic Usage

Agencies are allowed to insert graphic on lower level pages in the "page content" section as long as the image is consistent with the overall design of the site. Images should be used judiciously and must be accompanied by the use of Alt Text to ensure accessibility.

Alt Text provides text for use when the image is not being displayed. The content of the ALT Text should convey the purpose or relevance of the image rather than just providing a description of the image. ALT Text is required for all images to maintain accessibility validation of the page.

```

```

Template Look and Content

The Look and Feel, the Navigation, and the Common Components of the CLF templates were developed by the Government Information Center and comply with the current Web Presentation Standards/Guidelines Content Specifications. This section will highlight and describe the basic components of the CLF template navigation and the items that are consist on every page of the templates. This section will also briefly introduce the taxonomy strategy incorporated in the State Common Look and Feel.

Common Look and Feel

The concept of a State Common Look and Feel is to allow agency websites to be quickly associated with the State Portal (Delaware.gov). The underlying philosophy behind the Portal is that, from the user's perspective, the divisions between agencies (and even other levels of government) are irrelevant. The Portal was constructed around the intentions of the visitor, not the separations between state entities. The unique design of the Portal aside, state agencies are accountable to their customers for the quality of information and service they provide. Regardless of how a visitor navigates to a state page, once they arrive there it is important that they know that the State of Delaware is ultimately accountable for the quality of information and level of service provided. The Common Look and Feel described in this manual meets the goal of portal branding and integration, and gives the agencies the tools to provide easy and organized access to government information online.

Common Navigation

One of the advantages of having a State Common Look and Feel is a consistent navigation strategy on every page. The consistent navigation is a great benefit to the website users because they know they are at a State owned/operated website and they do not have to relearn the navigation for every agency. The State Common Look and Feel currently utilizes four common navigation elements a Header, a SiteTitle (breadcrumb), a Side Navigation, and a Footer.

Header



Figure 3

Besides being aesthetically appealing the header in the CLF contains text and image links various State resources. The specific links were included in the header because they allow a citizen to quickly navigate many services and information provided by the State and/or they were frequently requested according to the web server statistics.

Template Look and Content

Header Options

Three Branches of Government

- Visit the Governor = Executive Branch
- General Assembly = Legislative Branch
- Courts = Judicial

Elected Officials

- Federal
- State
- City/Local

State Employee Directory

- Phone
- Email
- State Locator Codes

Portal Help

- Site Navigation Instructions

Statewide Search

- Basic Search
- Advance Search

Portal Intentions

- Citizen Services = Resident Intention
- Business Services = Business Intention
- Visitor Info. = Visitor Intention

Image Links

- It's Good Be First Button = Delaware Tourism Office
- State of Delaware Image = State Portal (Delaware.gov)
- Caesar Rodney Image = Delaware Facts and Symbols

Site Title



Department of State: Government Information Center

Figure 4

The next navigation component in the CLF templates is the Agency SiteTitle (breadcrumb). The SiteTitle allows users to quickly identify the agency of the web pages they are viewing. In addition to identification the site title can also be used to navigate back to the main page of the agency website for further research in a specific area.

Template Look and Content

Side Navigation

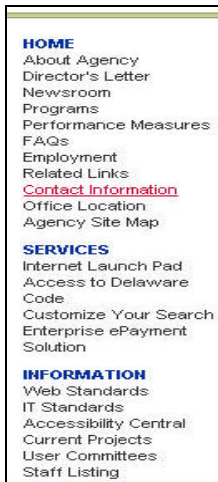


Figure 5

Probably the most frequently used navigation component of the CLF templates is the Side Navigation. A lot of thought and analysis was put into the strategy behind the Side Navigation to ensure it was usable and appropriate across all state agencies. The strategy that was decided on that accomplishes these goals is a Home, Services, and Information taxonomy of links. The three sections that make up the Side Navigation are described in more details below.

Home - Items under the Home section are common components that provide basic information about the agency. The Common Components section of this document outlines the required and optional items that are displayed in this section. The architecture of the CLF templates allow these links to be easily updated by using the SSI file /Navigation/nav-home.html.

Services – Agency are instructed to provide links to services that a user can perform online under the Service section of the Side Navigation. Some examples of services are license renewals, tax filing, meeting registration, payment, and address change. Agency will need to determine what they offer that can be classified as a service. The architecture of the CLF templates allow these links to be easily updated by using the SSI file /Navigation/nav-services.html.

Information - Agency are instructed to provide links to information that a user can read online under the Information section of the Side Navigation. Some examples are fee rates, state holidays, meeting schedules, and general election results. Agency will need to determine what they offer that can be classified as a service. The architecture of the CLF templates allow these links to be easily updated by using the SSI file /Navigation/nav-information.html.

Footer



Figure 6

The Footer on the CLF templates indicates to the user that they are at the bottom of the page and provides additional page options and a link back to the State Portal (Delaware.gov).

Template Look and Content

Footer Options

- **Site Map** – This option displays a list of all of the pages in an agency website.
- **About this Site** – This option lists the technologies used and the required policies and disclaimers.
- **Contact Us** – This option is the same as the Contact Information under the Home section of the Side Navigation.
- **Translate** – This option instructs users on how they can translate the content of the website into different languages.
- **Delaware.gov** – This option allows users to quickly navigate back to the States Portal.

Common Components

In addition to the common navigation components described in the previous section the CLF templates also incorporate common page components across agency websites. The common page components promote a user-friendly environment and allow the users to quickly obtain basic information from each agency website they visit.

In addition, to providing the basic information on every agency website the location of the basic information is made intuitive and consistent by the CLF templates. This common placement approach allows users to quickly locate information and prevents the user from having to “hunt” around the agency website.

Required Agency Information

- **About the Agency** - The agency/division’s name and purpose. This option is located on the Home section of the Side Navigation and also on the Footer.
- **News Room** – A listing of Press Releases, Media Links, Hot Topics, Coming Events and Photos as appropriate.
- **Divisions\Programs** – A listing of the various Divisions and/or Programs within the agency.
- **Office Location** - The location of the agency’s main office and the location of any locations that directly service customers (if applicable). This option is located on the Home section of the Side Navigation.
- **Contact Information** - A mechanism (telephone list, e-mail list, comments form, etc.) through which users can direct questions, comments or complaints. This option is located the Home section of the Side Navigation.

Template Look and Content

- **FAQs** – A list of agency specific Frequently Asked Questions. If structure appropriately, these lists have the potential to redirect a portion of the telephone and walk in traffic currently handled by agencies. This option is located the Home section of the Side Navigation.
- **Agency Site Map** – In addition to the web sites navigation an agency site map is an easy way for a user to find the service and/or information they need. This option is located on the Footer.
- **Time and Date Stamps** - Date stamping web pages will let visitors know when the material they are viewing was last refreshed. This option is located in the bottom right of every page above the Footer.

Optional Agency Information

- **Director's Letter** – Greeting from the Director or Agency Head. This option should be placed in the Home section of the Side Navigation under the About Agency option if it is needed.
- **Performance Measures** – Page containing performance measures of interest to the public. This option should be placed in the Home section of the Side Navigation under the Divisions / Programs option if it is needed.
- **Employment** – A listing of agency recruiting and links to State Personnel Office and/or Department of Labor's VCNET. This option should be placed in the Home section of the Side Navigation under the FAQs option if it is needed.
- **Calendar of Events** – A listing of agency public meetings or events and/or links to the Delaware Calendar System. This option should be placed in the Home section of the Side Navigation under the Employment option if it is needed.
- **Related Links** – A listing containing links to organizations with similar interests or focus as the agency. This option should be placed in the Home section of the Side Navigation under the Calendar of Events option if it is needed.

Policies and Disclaimers

To instill user confidence and to adhere to web regulations and best practices the CLF templates contains a link to a section that lists various certifications, policies, and disclaimers regarding the pages that make up the CLF websites. This option is made available from the Footer of all of the CLF web pages from the link labeled "About this Site". The policies listed are the same as for the State Portal on most agency websites however; some agency websites require policies and procedures that are unique to only their site.

Template Look and Content

About this Site

Site Help – This link points to the general State Portal Site Help page and contains the following information.

- Email link to the Government Information Center
- Delaware Helpline web link and toll free number
- Virtual Librarian
- Statewide FAQ

Accessibility – This link points to the general accessibility statement on the State Portal and states the accessibility certifications that the State Portal and the CLF Templates have received. It also has a link to the State's Accessibility Central website.

Disclaimer – This link points to the general content disclaimer on the State Portal. This disclaimer identifies the agencies as the authors and maintainers of the contents and provides the guidelines regarding accuracy of content.

Privacy Policy – This link points to the general privacy policy on the State Portal. This policy addresses topics such as, information submitted online, emails to agencies, cookies, and information disclosure policies.

Security Policy – Currently there is not a link to a State security policy form this page however, security is briefly discussed in the State Portal privacy policy. A separate policy is being developed and a link will be added to this page in future versions of the CLF templates.

Operational Recommendations

For any form of media to be truly useful and successful the potential viewing audience needs to be gauged and relevant material provided for the audience. This concept also applies to websites. In the private sector one of the major goals of a website is sales/ecommerce however, one of the main goals of a public sector website is to provide easy and organized access to government information. This section outlines some general recommendations that agencies should follow to ensure they are using the CLF templates to their fullest potential.

Non-Technical Input

The CLF templates were developed to be simple not only in display but for editing. Content can be added to the CLF templates by any of the standard HTML or Text editors. In addition to their local webmasters agencies are also encouraged to allow the agencies public information officers and customer services representatives to provide input and in some situations edit the CLF templates. The goal of this recommendation is to ensure the content provided online is appropriate and answers the user's questions. Often an agency webmaster is not specialized enough to anticipate the appropriate content that should be available online. The Government Information Center has funded a training class titled "Writing for the Web" that can help agencies in this area.

User/Customer Perspective Testing

Invariably, visitors to agency web sites will be using different types of user agents, (i.e., Netscape and Internet Explorer browser, handheld PDAs, etc.). These differences in user agents can make web sites look different, regardless of how they appear in the browser/desktop configuration in which they are designed. As stated before one of the main goals of the CLF templates is to help agencies provide accessible content to the widest audiences range possible. To accomplish this goal many hours of testing were performed with various user agents. The architecture used by the CLF templates is a result of this testing and can accommodate all of the known industry standard user agents. Support for new user agents is being added to the CLF templates as they come available. In addition to the user/customer perspective testing that was put into the development of the CLF templates agencies are strongly encouraged to test all of the pages they deploy from the user/customers perspective.

Portal Integration

The Delaware.gov web portal is the primary gateway to all State of Delaware web services and information. In order for visitors to have the quickest, most intuitive access to the information and services on agency pages, it is important that any new or modified web content be reflected in the Portal intentions listing. Each state agency has designated specific individuals to act as liaisons with the Portal management team. These individuals should understand the Portal update process and be in regular contact with the Portal management team at the Government Information Center to ensure that any changes to agency content are reflected in the Portal. The CLF templates were designed so the user can quickly identify that the page they are viewing is part of the State of Delaware and

Operational Recommendations

the State Portal. Additionally, the CLF templates were designed so the statewide search engine on the Portal is able to accurately index/spider the pages. Agencies are encouraged to keep in mind the big picture of the State Portal and ensure their pages are properly listed in the State Portal.

Statistic Monitoring

Every agency that hosts a web site through the Department of Technology and Information can obtain a monthly report from the web server log files that provide statistical details of the traffic to their web sites. These reports (which must be explicitly requested by agencies) provide invaluable information about the web site usage. Sample reports include the number of unique visitors, the most frequently requested files, the less frequently requested files, the user agent used to view the website, and the amount of time spent at the website. Many other reports are also available for analysis. To be useful and productive web sites require constant refinement and adjustment. The information contained in these reports is an excellent source for identify the components of a web site that need refining or that can be highlighted. The state Portal (Delaware.gov) uses these types of reports to determine content placement on the Portal. Agencies are also strongly encouraged to analyze their reports and place links to their frequently requested services and information under the corresponding sections of the Side Navigation.

Supporting Documentation

There are various supporting documents that are available to assist agencies that are in the process of implementing and/or maintaining the State Common Look and Feel. Additional documentation will be developed as needed. Listed below are the existing documents that relate to the State Common Look and Feel. The support documentation, along with this document, can be obtained from the Government Information Center intranet site this they developed and maintain the State Common Look and Feel.

Available Documentation

CLF Implementation Guide

CLF Frequently Asked Question and Answers

CLF Style Guides

CLF Elements Defined

CLF Release Notes

SSI To Include or Not to Include

Customizing Your Search

Access the Delaware Code